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SUBJECT: THE FARC'S INTERNATIONAL TENTACLES

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has outgrown its local roots and should now be characterized as a regional terrorist group with hemispheric reach. Its tentacles reach into many Latin American countries. International law enforcement cooperation has led to the arrest of five key FARC "ambassadors" or operatives in four Latin American countries over the past three years, dealing a blow to the organization's propaganda and fund-raising activities. The FARC still maintains "ambassadors" and other operatives in Latin America, however, highlighting its continued international presence and ambitions. End summary.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION DEALS BLOW TO FARC

¶2. (U) Brazilian police arrested the FARC's "ambassador" in Brazil, Francisco Antonio Medina Collazos, on an Interpol warrant August 24, making Medina the fifth key FARC operative arrested in Latin America in the past three years. His extradition to Colombia is pending. Longtime FARC member Medina, aka "El Cura," aka "Pacho," aka "Oliverio Medina," is wanted in Colombia for murder for his leadership of the 1991 attack on a military base in Meta in which a number of people died. According to Colombian press accounts, Medina organized from Sao Paulo the FARC's outreach to Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia.

¶3. (U) Aside from Medina, international law enforcement cooperation has led to the arrest and extradition of an additional four key FARC "ambassadors" in Latin America: Eugenio Vargas Perdomo (aka "Carlos Bolas"), arrested in Suriname in June 2002; "Simon Trinidad," seized in Ecuador in January 2004; Rodrigo Granda, captured in Venezuela in December 2004; and Juan Jose Martin Vega (aka "El Chiguiro"), detained in Venezuela in February 2005.

FARC MAINTAINS, REPLENISHES OVERSEAS OPERATIVES

¶4. (SBU) We understand that at least eight FARC "ambassadors" continue to have representational and other responsibilities in Latin America, some covering more than one country. They are the tip of the iceberg but have the highest profile of the FARC's international operatives. According to weekly magazine "Cambio," the individuals are:

Pablo Trejos Freyre: Peru

Nubia Calderon (aka "Esperanza"): Ecuador and Bolivia

Aldo Moscote Fragoso: Venezuela

Luis Alberto Alban Urbano (aka "Marco Leon Calarca"): Cuba and Canada

Jairo Alfonso Lesmes: Paraguay, Uruguay, and Chile

Ovidio Salinas Perez (aka "Juan A. Rojas"): Panama and Venezuela

Miguel Angel Castaneda (aka "Miguel Diaz Pachi"): Costa Rica

Hernando Vanegas: Sweden

Andean Nation Outreach

¶5. (C) Proximity, lax border controls, and government inaction make neighboring nations the number one target for FARC international missions. The FARC does business, transits and even trains nationals from other countries in the Andean region, most often in Venezuela and Ecuador. One of the FARC's goals is to export the "revolution," so some members focus on gaining support and establishing a revolutionary network in select countries abroad. In addition, the FARC reportedly meets and works with leftist groups in several Latin American countries.

-- Venezuela: In addition to Granda and "El Chiguiró," the GOC has requested the immediate arrest of seven other high-profile FARC leaders known to reside in Venezuela. Hundreds of members reside in camps across the border from Colombia's Cesar and Norte de Santander Departments. According to the GOC, the Venezuelan government has provided safe-haven (including official Venezuelan identity cards), to FARC operatives since 2001 and ignored Colombian requests to expel FARC members. Over the last several years, Venezuela has become a major supplier for FARC camps in southern Colombia.

-- Ecuador: The FARC historically has enjoyed safehaven and medical treatment in Ecuador, although the GOE is working now to hinder FARC activity, and arrest and extradite members. Since the Ecuadorian border is adjacent to the FARC's southern strongholds, many guerrillas cross the border freely. The Ecuadorian Government does not have the resources to defend the border, stop routine FARC incursions and impede camps from migrating into Ecuador. Nevertheless, the January 2004 arrest of Simon Trinidad and subsequent extraditions has put the FARC on the defensive and ensured a lower-profile presence. A February 2005 communique to the Ecuadorians called on the president to carry out his agreement with the FARC. Ecuador denied all knowledge of any "agreement" and pledged to continue the fight against the group.

Southern Cone Activity

16. (C) Southern Cone nations have had less contact with the FARC, but there is evidence that the group is active in the area. Like the Andean nations, Southern Cone nations have weak border controls and the access to weapons that the FARC is seeking.

-- Paraguay: The FARC made front-page headlines with evidence that they masterminded the kidnapping of former Paraguayan President Raul Cubas' daughter, Cecilia Cubas in September 2004. According to reports by post and the media, FARC leader Rodrigo Granda (subsequently captured in Venezuela in December 2004) was behind the crime. Paraguayan Attorney General Latorre accused the FARC of training Paraguayans in kidnapping methods in exchange for weapons. It is clear that the FARC uses Paraguay as a significant weapons source and logistical base. As a result, the GOP has created a special unit to target the FARC and gather information about FARC activity in country.

-- Brazil: Brazil has been less affected by FARC activities than other neighboring nations, but there is recent evidence of a small presence. In March, the Brazilian media outlined allegations that the FARC had funded the Brazilian PT (Worker's Party) during the 2002 elections. Brazilian weekly magazine "Veja" reported that there was some evidence in the Brazilian intelligence agency that the FARC gave USD 5 million to the party and the GOB has opened an investigation into the matter. In a separate incident, Brazilian authorities along the Amazon border seized a shipment of medicine, guns and munitions destined for the FARC. The medicine was to treat leishmaniasis, a potentially fatal parasitic infection, which has been a problem for both GOC forces and the FARC in the jungle combat zone. Brazilian press speculated that other medicine shipments for the FARC had probably passed that border region undetected.

-- Chile: Chile is another nation used by the FARC as a narcotics consumer and occasional safehaven. In November 2004, Chilean officials were asked to grant asylum for FARC leader Jairo Curan Collazo, who reportedly entered Chile with fake identification and eluded Colombian law enforcement.

Central America and Caribbean Ties

17. (C) The FARC has some presence in both Central America and the Caribbean, most notably in Cuba and Panama.

-- Cuba: Given ideological sympathies, the FARC and Cuban authorities have maintained a cordial relationship. Cuba offers safe haven to FARC international front leader Raul Reyes' wife and children among others. Cuba's ties to the FARC seem to have declined since President Uribe took office in 2002, but there is evidence that Cuba's doors remain open to members.

-- Panama: U.S. law enforcement and intelligence reports indicate that Panama has been used as a money-laundering destination for the FARC. While the GOP banking authorities attempt to crack down by calling on all banks to follow international anti-money laundering guidelines and avoid narco-terrorist entities (such as those named by U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Asset Control) standards, the Colon Free Zone, a booming casino industry, and geography

leave it open to free movement and ongoing trans-border activity.

-- Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua: According to press reports, at least two FARC members were arrested in Honduras for arms and drug trafficking on March 20. Honduran Minister of Security Alvarez claimed that the weapons being shipped to Colombia included AK-47 and M-60 machine-guns and RPG-6 rocket launchers, as well as ammunition, and grenades. Alvarez also claimed that the FARC had made an attempt against President Ricardo Maduro's life in March, although there was no substantial proof to back the claim. Some intelligence reports claim that in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala FARC representatives conduct weapons for drugs (or cash) deals on occasion. San Andres Island, a department of Colombia off the coast of Nicaragua, is a convenient transport point.

Echoes in Europe, Though Fainter

18. (C) In 2001, Raul Reyes, the FARC's International Front Director and 33 other FARC members took a month long tour of European capitals as part of the Pastrana peace negotiations.

According to the national weekly magazine "Cambio," the FARC had placed permanent representatives in Spain and Sweden and even established a FM radio station in Stockholm during the Pastrana administration. However, the 2002 kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt, a French-Colombian dual national, prompted European nations to declare the FARC a foreign terrorist organizations in June 2002 and placed sanctions on the group.

The FARC have had a continued presence in several European nations, but unofficial interactions between the FARC and sympathetic non-governmental groups have become more clandestine.

-- Denmark: In October 2004, Danish police began an investigation of the Danish NGO "Rebelion Association" members who publicly claimed that they raised and sent (USD 8,500) to the FARC. When confronted by police, the group claimed that no money was actually transferred, but rather the announcement had been to show solidarity with the FARC's cause. In August, Rebelion was charged with supporting and attempting to fund the FARC. The Danish courts agreed to partially shut down the website.

-- Sweden: ANNCOL, a website that touts the news for "a new Colombia," carries articles from Latin American and European journalists. The group has maintained a website since 1998 which prints all FARC correspondence and serves as a public relations branch and a media outlet for the organization. Raul Reyes routinely posts interviews on the website.

Comment

19. (C) The FARC began life in 1964 as a peasant community self-defense group whose international activities were minimal. Recent arrests in several Latin American countries demonstrate just how far the FARC's reach extends. FARC operatives in Latin America play an important role in raising money, forging or buying political support, and securing R&R or medical facilities for FARC guerrillas. The FARC has taken significant blows in recent years from the Colombian military and Latin American governments, but the fact that arrests have been made and FARC activities disrupted demonstrates that it is now more accurately characterized at a minimum as a regional terrorist organization with hemispheric reach. End comment.

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